

#149 VALENTINO ALVARADO: MESS COOK ABOARD THE USS *MARYLAND*

Bart Fredo (BF): Okay, you're rolling? Okay. The following interview is of Valentino Alvarado, it was conducted on 12-2-86 at Honolulu, at about 12:45 in the afternoon. Mr. Alvarado lives in Montrose, Colorado. The interview is conducted by Bart Fredo, assisted by Mark Tanaka-Sanders.

First of all, why don't you tell me your name and where you were from back in 1941.

Valentino Alvarado (VA): My name is Valentino Alvarado. Most people call me Val. And I'm from Montrose, Colorado, and that's where I joined the Navy from.

BF: What was your rank and what was your job in the Navy?

VA: Well, you know, I came in as an Apprentice Seaman and when I got out of the Navy after World War II, I was a First Class Parachute Rigger. I came back in and retired as a Chief Petty Officer.

BF: How did you come to be assigned to Hawaii in 1941?

VA: Well, you know, after boot camp in San Diego, there was three of us from my hometown that joined the Navy together and we all wanted to go on the *COLORADO*. You might . . . we were lucky that we didn't get on the *COLORADO* otherwise we were unlucky because the only battleship of the Pacific coast was not near Pearl Harbor. She was over in the States. I was assigned to her sister ship, the *MARYLAND*. And another buddy of mine was assigned to the *TENNESSEE* and one assigned to the *NEW YORK*, in New York City.

BF: What were you doing, early morning, December 7th, '41.

VA: In 1941 I was, at that time, I was a mess cook, I was Seaman Second [Class]. And we was only getting twenty-one dollars a month. And being a mess cook, they gave us a lot of tips at payday, so I was a mess cook making more money than the Chief.

BF: Where were you physically that morning, early that morning?

VA: I just got through washing my dishes and had thrown dishwater off the port deck when all the planes were overhead, coming in.

BF: What did you first think?

VA: I thought it was our own planes, you know, on maneuvers, you know. Until they started dropping the bombs and general quarters went. I went to my battle station and right away we couldn't use our sixteen-inch guns so they brought us back up and we saw the *OKLAHOMA* going, being hit, and trying to get the lines off and just saw working parties, you know, just everybody just pitched in and everybody was really working together.

BF: What specifically were you doing when the attack was taking place?

VA: Well, we was helping the men from the *OKLAHOMA*, you know, abandon board, get them out of the water and fighting the fires, you know, that started up

while the oil was . . . that's what we did most of the time, just helping, you know. And then getting ammunition to the crews.

BF: What was going through your mind when all of this was happening?

VA: Looks like nothing, I mean, just, we were fighting the Japanese and actually we were happy at the time, you know, because we were going to beat 'em. We were going to . . . we could've been looking for them all this time. But then, after the attack, most of the guys were crying, you know. But during the attack, we were happy we were in the war. I don't know why, but we were.

BF: Just you, or the other men around you?

VA: Well, I know that I . . . we took a boy out of the brig and it was this little colored boy. And he worked harder than I, you know, he was always telling me, "I'm free, I'm free," because he was in the brig, you know. And I remember him very . . . because we, he and I worked in a lot of working parties, you know. Whenever they called for a working party, we all volunteered, you know, real quick. But at the time, we were happy, actually because we weren't _____, it was kind of a strange.

BF: That is a strange reaction.

VA: Because all this time, we had been out at sea looking for the Japanese, you know. And we were going to just blow 'em out of the water, but it didn't happen that way, they blew us out of the water.

BF: How long did it take before you realized the magnitude of what happened? Or what was happening?

VA: Well, you know, it looks like they came then a couple of strikes and they were gone, you know. When we started shooting at every airplane that we saw in the sky for the next two days. But they were only just there maybe an hour or so, or less.

BF: While this was going on, did it seem like a long period of time, or did it seem like a very short period of time?

VA: Well, it seemed like about a half a day, but actually it was just an hour or two, you know, or less than two hours.

BF: Can you think? What was going through your mind? Any specific things besides what you've already told me? Anything else was going through your mind. Were you afraid?

VA: Well, I don't think I was afraid, you know. But we were scared there, at the last, you know. But, no, I wasn't scared. We weren't scared.

BF: Did you shoot at any of the planes? Did you have a gun?

VA: No, I didn't have no gun or nothing, no. They didn't give us no guns, you know. We just helped people that were hurt, get them inside and so forth. I was just a Seaman, I was only eighteen years old, you know, just made eighteen. I guess they didn't trust me with a gun. (Chuckles)

BF: Can you relate to us any particular incidents that happened that stick out in your mind on that day?

VA: I remember that we were all together, I mean everybody was really . . . when they called for a working party before you know you could jerk around, but this time we just all volunteered, everybody volunteered for any working party that was called out, you know. And we wanted to help everybody, you know. And another thing, the biggest thrill I got when we left the harbor, we were the first battleship to leave the harbor and the crew of the *NEVADA*, which got ran aground, we went there. The whole crew came up forward to give us three big cheers, "Yay, *MARYLAND*. Yah, *MARYLAND*." And your heart sank from the bottom down to your throat, you know. It was a great thrill for us to get that. It really made you feel great, kinda like you want to cry.

BF: At what point did the Maryland manage to make it out of the harbor?

VA: Well, we were the first battleship out of the harbor. And we thought we was gonna last the Japanese, but were damaged, so we had to go to Bremerton, Washington up there to get it repaired.

BF: Was it that same day that you left the harbor?

VA: No, no, no. It was, I guess, two or three weeks, I guess.

BF: What was the rest of that day like, December 7, after the planes had left, the attacking planes had left?

VA: Well, you know, they threw everything overboard. They threw our tables, our sea bag with our clothes. Everything was gone. So we didn't have no clothes and place to eat for three or four days, because we just ate sandwiches, you know. And it was kind of, kind of strange. You know, we used to sleep in hammocks, you know, and they threw them over the side. All our clothing and so forth, we never had nothing.

BF: How long did that go on?

VA: Well, I didn't get any clothing for about maybe a week. And just ate out of a . . . they used to bring us sandwiches, you know, and coffee. That's all we had.

BF: When did it finally sink in on what had just happened, the significance, the magnitude of what had happened? How long did it take? Did you realize it that day, or was it later?

VA: I think it was that day, that we were at war, especially that night, you know. We had a watch, you know, and . . .

BF: Duty watch?

VA: . . . yeah, at night. And, well, I mean, when we saw any of the light up in the sky or something, you know, we thought it was a plane, we'd report it and everybody would start shooting at it. And we were at war.

BF: How long did you stay in Hawaii after the attack? You said your ship left within several weeks, you left with it, I assume?

VA: Yeah, right, yeah. And then, we got . . . first of all, I got transferred to the [USS] *McCALLA*, the [DD-]488 and got her in New York and we came back through the Panama Canal and San Diego, and came right down to Hawaii again.

BF: Let me take you back to Hawaii, though. In the three weeks, two or three weeks that you were in Hawaii, after the attack, what was life like after you'd gotten some new clothes?

VA: Well, I didn't go ashore for . . . you know, at that time, we didn't have no money. And my parents were pretty poor so I sent most of my money home. And I go to town, down Hotel Street and so forth, just to watch the -- I used to go down to the YCA, YMCA and do some boxing. And I did some boxing while I was in the Navy.

BF: Martial law was on then, right?

VA: Yeah, yeah.

BF: How did that affect you?

VA: Well, I never had no car or nothing, I mean, I don't smoke or anything. I think you couldn't smoke outside and you couldn't have your lights on, you know. And I think it was blackout. Everything was dark.

BF: How did martial law affect the civilians? Did you have any way of knowing that?

VA: No, the civilian population, the friends I had, I mean, there, in my boxing team, there was some Japanese people, guys, and they changed their name to Wong and Fong and so forth, and they joined the Army. Right away, yeah. They're really Americans, you know.

BF: Did you have much chance to get to know civilians during your years in Hawaii, or your time in Hawaii?

VA: Yes, I met a boy by the name of Frank Cuterez who lives here. I just went to visit him the other day. And he's kind of my coach of my boxing career.

BF: Can you think of one thing that stands out above everything else, as far as the attack is concerned? One thing that sticks out in your mind.

VA: No, how we mobilized and really helping each other, you know. We used to just like more brothers than before, you know. We were just a big family then, see.

BF: And that sticks out in your mind more than anything else. Can you think of anything else that you recall very vividly from that day?

VA: No, I mean, you know, this is we're having our forty-fifth anniversary this week and this is my first time I've been here since then, for the reunion. And I'm meeting some wonderful guys, you know/

BF: The events of that day, does the day seemed like it happened only yesterday, to use a cliché, or is your memory about the events of that day pretty hazy?

VA: When I see a movie or film, I get emotional, I cry, you know. I can't help it. And I start thinking about it, about what happened. And somebody told me if that if you keep talking about it I won't cry any more, and I haven't, I've been okay.

BF: It's worked?

VA: Yeah.

BF: You were part of one of the most important events in history. How does that play -- has that played a role in your life at all? Has that affected your life in any way, for the rest of your life?

VA: No, no. No, I just . . . well, people forget, you know. People forget that . . . that's why I hope that our organization is that, you know, we're trying to -- we've got a movie here we're going to send to the school kids and so forth to remember Pearl Harbor and keep America alert, you know. We don't want another thing like this to happen again.

(CONVERSATION OFF-MIKE)

BF: I just wanted to thank you.

VA: Yeah, thanks.

BF: Is there anything, before you take that microphone off, is there anything that you can think of that you might want to talk about . . .

(TAPE STOPS, RESTARTS)

BF: Is there anything else about the attack that I haven't asked you about that you'd like to tell us?

VA: Well, I -- there was a boy by the name of Billy Miller who was on the Pennsylvania during the attack. I wished I could see him again. (Crying)

BF: Do you know if he survived the war?

VA: I don't know. Yeah. He survived the attack. Good friend of mine.

BF: You used to box together?

VA: Yeah. Fought about three times with him. (Crying)

BF: Did you beat him?

VA: One time. He beat me one time. It was a draw. Yeah.

BF: And you haven't seen him in forty-five years.

VA: Yeah. Long time.

END OF INTERVIEW